

Advice by [tjmystic](#)

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Summary:

In which Dustin asks Steve an awkward question about dating.

Advice

Knock knock! Knock KNOCK! KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK –

“Alright alright!” Steve shouts, throwing his pencil across the counter. “It’s not like I’m busy trying to fill in this stupid application, no, I’m *totally* free, you – Dustin.”

The fourteen-year-old on his porch drops his fists, shoving them awkwardly into his pockets. Steve would love to say that he’s surprised to see him, but he’s not. Since Halloween, Dustin’s come over at least once a week, usually with a story about some game at the arcade or some new theory about the Upside-Down. He is, however, surprised that he can look straight – not down – to meet the kid’s eyes. He seems to have grown like three inches overnight.

“Steve, good, you’re here,” Dustin sighs, relieved. “I need advice. Like, now.”

Steve opens his mouth, but Dustin pushes past him, wringing his hands all the way to the kitchen. He doesn’t have to turn around to hear the kid open the fridge, take out the last Tab, and down half the thing in a single swallow.

“Why are you just filling this out now?” he belches, riffling through the papers still spread out on the kitchen counter. “I thought college applications were due last month?”

Steve, still facing the open door, tosses back his head and closes his eyes.

“Please, come on in, make yourself at home,” he grumbles to himself.

He shuts the thing with his foot and wanders back to his seat. Dustin is still poring over the essay, a look on his face like he ate bad meat.

“Dude, your paragraph structure is way off.”

Steve snatches the paper from his hand and throws it to the floor with his pencil. “Yeah, well, I’m working on it. And I’m not the one who hauled my ass all the way over here for advice. What’s up?”

That nervous tic comes back to the corner of Dustin’s mouth. His eyes, roving over everything like a hyperactive puppy just a second ago, are now focused firmly on his hands in his lap. Any annoyance in Steve’s face flies right out the window.

“Hey,” he mutters, leaning closer to put his hand on the kid’s elbow, “what’s wrong? Did something happen at school? It’s not that James kid again, is it, because I swear to God – ”

Dustin shakes his head, but his expression doesn’t shift. “No, it’s nothing like that.”

Steve waits, hovering over Dustin’s shoulder. He doesn’t move.

“Okaaaaaay... so what is it like, then?”

Dustin looks away, looks down, then, finally, looks back at Steve.

“I think we should probably sit down.”

Steve jumps to his feet – he doesn’t mention that he was already sitting down – and leads them both to the living room. Dustin takes

the recliner without question, just as he always does, and Steve, though reluctant, sits down across from him on the couch. Dustin shifts on the cushions. Steve waits. Dustin taps his foot, still lost looking at his hands. Steve waits. Dustin sighs. Steve opens his mouth to ask again, but, thankfully, Dustin finally speaks.

“Okay, so there’s this girl – ”

Steve sags forward and barks out a laugh. “This is about a girl?”

Dustin glares at him across the table. Steve cuts the laugh short, coughing it into his hand. “Sorry. Go ahead.”

“Okay, so there’s this girl – ”

“Is it Max? Cause if it’s Max, I’m telling her *and* Lucas, and I’m letting them both kick your ass.”

Dustin groans. “No, it’s not Max, you dickhead. It’s – ”

Steve’s eyes widen. “Is it Jane?”

“What? No!” Dustin shakes his head and glares. “You do know that there’s more than two girls in eighth grade, right? And stop interrupting!”

Steve sits back, hands in the air, and gestures for Dustin to continue. The kid huffs, then looks down at his feet.

“It’s... her name is Sally Denson. She’s, uh... she’s actually in seventh grade. But she’s super smart, okay, and, like, her parents want to send her to high school next year, so she started sitting in on our

science class, and she dissected a freakin' frog like it was *nothing*, but I think she uses perfume because she smells kinda like pine trees all the time, and she asked me to the movies to watch *Ladyhawke* with her, and... and how the fuck are you supposed to kiss a girl?"

Steve chokes. No, choke is the wrong word – “choke” implies that he breathed wrong and started spewing up spit. Steve isn't exactly breathing, but he is *definitely* covered in his own spit now.

“Don't laugh, it isn't funny!”

Steve shakes his head, still trying to work out how to make his mouth move. “Nope, not laughing. Just, uh... you sure I'm the right person to be asking about this?”

Dustin throws his hands up in the air and rolls his eyes.

“No, I should definitely ask one of the guys, that wouldn't be awkward at all! Or my dad, you know, the shitbag who lives in *New Mexico*!”

Steve shifts a little, but, thankfully, Dustin keeps talking.

“Besides we all know you're a ladies' man. If anyone has the goods on this, it's you! You're like the best person to ask about this!”

Steve looks away, trying to control the red on his cheeks. He wants to say that he's not as much of a “ladies' man” as Dustin thinks. He wants to say that he hasn't kissed anyone at all in almost six months, not since Nancy started dating Jonathan. He wants to say that this is every bit as damned awkward as Dustin asking his “the guys”, and that fashion advice is one thing but this is something else entirely.

He doesn't say any of that. He groans, takes Dustin's Tab, and finishes it.

"Okay, first off, has she indicated at all that she *wants* you to kiss her?"

In front of him, the tension seems to melt off of Dustin's face.

"I don't know? She held my hand for, like, three seconds at lunch when we reached for the same roll. And she invited me to this girly movie, that means something, right?"

Steve sets down the empty can. "It might. Honestly, it probably does. But don't just assume, okay? Remember how we talked about the electricity?"

"Yeah, wait till you feel it, then make your move."

"Yeah." Steve nods, and offers him a little smile. "See, you've got nothing to worry about."

"Uh, yeah I do!" Dustin disagrees, shaking his head so hard that the cap almost falls off of his head. "What happens if the electricity goes off?!"

"What?"

"The actual kissing part! How do I do that?"

"Come on dude, you've seen people kiss."

“Yeah, but I’ve never done it! Well, I tried kissing an orange once, you know, for practice, but these stupid things – ” he pointed to his new teeth – “kept getting in the way!”

Steve bites the inside of his cheek, because, otherwise, he’s going to burst out laughing.

“I mean, what if I accidentally bite her? That isn’t cool! Help me!”

“Okay, okay.” Steve runs a hand through his hair and pointedly looks anywhere but Dustin. “Okay, tip number two, an orange is way too hard. If you want to practice without a girl involved, use your hand.”

“My hand?”

Steve nods. “Yeah. Just, make a fist, and pretend that the hole between your thumb and your fingers is another mouth. You need to move your fingers, though, so it kinda feels like it’s actually another person.”

Dustin scrambles back to the kitchen and grabs the discarded pencil off of the floor. Steve rubs his temples when he realizes that the little asshole is writing everything down.

“Move... your... fingers,” Dustin repeats. “Alright, what else?”

“Wash your mouth out with Listerine no more than thirty minutes before you go out. Gum won’t cut it, and no girl wants to deal with bad breath.”

Dustin scribbles it all down then looks back up. Steve leans forward,

thinking about the first time he took a girl to the movies.

“Definitely order popcorn,” he adds. “Prime opportunity to hold hands, if you time it so that you’re reaching for it at the same time she is. Same as reaching for the roll. But no soda. The combination will just give you the hiccups, and you’re never gonna have a good first kiss like that. Oh, and always use the yawn technique.”

Steve mimes yawning, stretching his arms high over his head, then drapes the right one over the empty side of the couch, shooting the imaginary girl his best flirty-eyes expression. If he imagines it’s Nancy, he doesn’t say anything.

“Chicks love it,” he insists. “Never fails.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. One-hundred-percent success.”

Dustin finishes the last note, then comes back to the recliner. His arms seem a little looser, and he doesn’t look like there’s a storm cloud floating over his head anymore.

“Thanks, Steve.”

“No problem, kid.” Steve smiles before he can stop himself. “Just don’t tell anyone I told you this, alright, or else – ”

“You’ll kill me, yeah yeah.” Dustin gives him that goofy, shit-eating grin, then folds the paper and stuffs it under his hat. “So, you wanna grab a burger? I’ll pay.”

Steve's already reaching for his keys, but he shakes his head.

"I'm not letting you pay for my food."

"Yeah, you are," Dustin argues, following after Steve as he heads for the front door. "I've got to thank you somehow. This is, like, the thirtieth time you've saved my life."

Steve laughs. "I already gave you what you wanted, kid, no need to butter me up now."

"No, I'm serious! There has to be something I can do."

Steve steps over the mess of forgotten papers in the kitchen. The words, "Why would I make a good addition to your school?" glare at him. Steve bites his lip, then looks over his shoulder.

"Well, actually... you said something about my essay?"